

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
SEVENTH SUNDAY OF LUKE



Icon of St. Michael and the Holy Angels -- November 8th

THE CONFLICT OF THE GOOD AND BAD ANGELS

Those parts of God's creation which are inanimate and not endowed with reason have no freedom and automatically do God's will—they obey the rules He has laid down for them, which we call "the laws of nature." But those beings which God has endowed with reason, He has honored with great gifts—language and free will—and it is free will which invests each action of a free being with moral value. To be free to choose to do good and perform the will of God, not merely be forced to do so by irresistible natural laws, is essential for there to be any moral value in one's doing of good, and for obedience to the will of God to truly express love for God. However, to have the freedom to choose to do good, one must also be free to do evil, for without alternatives there can be no choice, and if there is no choice there is no moral value in doing good, it is simply an automatic reaction to irresistible force. Having the freedom to choose evil, one of the angels actually did so, and by so doing, from an angel of light became the devil. This took place before the creation of the visible world.

The devil, who is also called "Satan" or "the enemy," was created as a mighty and beautiful archangel, one of the most perfect and radiant, and for this reason he was given the name Lucifer, "the light-bearer". But when he chose not to do the will of God, he fell, lost his exalted qualities, and left his dwelling in heaven. St. Jude says: "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude v. 6). Lucifer had been richly endowed by the Creator and should have ever held his eyes on the Lord, "as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress." But instead he concentrated his attention on his own perfection, fell in love with it and was seized with pride. By doing this he left the path of truth, which united him with the Source of Life and Light, and entered the path of destruction. He forgot that he owed all to God, that all his perfections were the gift of God. He ascribed them to himself, and so seemed exceedingly great to himself. He was so blinded by the idea of his own greatness and considered, "is there any who is equal to me? Any angel ... or God, even God Himself. I myself am divine, I myself am a divinity!" Satan rose against his Lord and took with

him a large number of spirits who accepted his authority. The Archangel Michael took command of the angels who remained faithful to God, forming an army of angels, and entered into conflict with the fallen spirits. Long before the creation of the material world took place this war which was waged between the angels of light and the spirits of darkness. But light conquered darkness, and the rebels were hurled into the abyss.

The fall of the mighty spirit was horrifying and inevitable. "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven," says Christ (Luke 10:18). And this fall, associated with increasing stubbornness and hardening of heart continues, further and further downwards, to this day. One sin leads to another, pride leads to envy and spite, whose weapons are lies, false witness and cunning. Darkness falls when we leave the Source of light, and this is what happened to the devil. From a light-bearing angel he was transformed into the prince of darkness. But can he not repent? Would not the merciful Lord receive his penitence? One hermit, who pondered over this problem, was granted a revelation. An angel brought him from heaven the answer that forgiveness is always possible for those who repent. The holy man repeated this comforting reply to the devil, when he appeared before him. The enemy of mankind burst into laughter and disappeared: every thought of repentance is comic to him, every suggestion of humility unbearable. Stubbornness, hardness of heart and pride which develops into a habit can reach such a level that a sinner no longer wishes to make use of the means of salvation. This is the curse of pride—that extreme pride no longer desires salvation and hence perishes.

Thus the angelic world of light divided; some angels, faithful to the Lord, remain in light, joy, love and gratitude, piously serve God and all the time continue to develop, to make progress towards perfection, to closer union with the Lord. And they have gone so far in their work and in the path of grace, and have developed such a habit of goodness, that none of them can or will rebel against God now. The leader of this heavenly army is the radiant Michael, whereas that other world of darkness and spite consists of Satan and the demons.

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Worship with the Angels

Angels, in fact, have a key role in the Liturgy. Our Liturgy on earth is mystically a representation of the heavenly angelic liturgy. As many other aspects of the liturgy, the angels have both a symbolic and real role. Here the symbolism points to something real: the Liturgy indeed unites us with glorification beyond our human limitations.

If the Liturgy were just for this world, it would be a hopeless exercise, it could not possibly deliver what it promises. It would be an empty promise, and meaningless words and gestures. If the Liturgy were simply a heavenly, spiritual reality, with no relationship to our lives on earth and justice among peoples and nations, then it would also be meaningless, a flight from reality, a haven from the turmoil of the world. Angels are the connection with reality. They make real the abstract idea of the union of earthly and heavenly realities that gives the Liturgy its force to actually and truly change human life.

The presence of angels may also be a symbol of the presence of God. After the ascension of our Lord, the eternal reality is Jesus at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. Jesus alone is the eternal High Priest. Since, from Scripture, we see that the angels surround the throne of God constantly, proclaiming his holiness, if Christ is truly present among us now, then the angels are truly just as present.

The further conclusion is, of course, that our worship is equal in dignity to the heavenly worship. Angels and humans commingle, and "we represent the Cherubim."

Archpriest David M. Petras